The Role of the Lion in Miracles Associated with Shīʿite Imāms[1]

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Introduction

Our aim in this paper is to provide a typology and analysis of the roles lions play in miracles associated with Twelver Shīʿite Imams.[2] The topic merits scholarly attention for two reasons. First of all, the number of miraculous occurrences associated with Shīʿite Imāms in which lions play a role is considerable, absolutely and relatively; secondly, the subject of miracles in Shīʿism has so far not been treated exhaustively in the scholarly literature. To the best of my knowledge only three papers have been published on the matter: Amir-Moezzi (2000) contains a survey of miracles ascribed to Twelver Shīʿite Imāms;[3] Kohlberg (2001) is devoted in part to miracles ascribed to Imāms in which lions play a role;[4] another relevant paper is Loebenstein (2003), which discusses miracles attributed to the Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765).[5]

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[1]) I am deeply grateful to Professor Joseph Sadan and Professor George Kanazi and Dr. Aviva Broshi for their comments on a previous draft of this study.

[2]) In this paper the words "Shīʿite" and "Shīʿism" refer to Twelver Shīʿism throughout.

[3]) Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "Savoir c'est pouvoir. Exégèses et implications du miracle dans l'imamisme ancien (Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine, V)," in Denise Aigle, ed., *Miracle et karâma* (Turnhout, 2000), 251–86.

[4]) Etan Kohlberg, "Vision and the Imams," in Eric Chaumont, Denise Aigle, Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Pierre Lory, eds., *Autour du regard. Mélanges d'islamologie offerts à Daniel Gimaret* (Leuven, 2003), 125–57.

[5]) Judith Loebenstein, "Miracles in Šīʿī Thought: a Case-Study of the Miracles Attributed to Imam Ǧaʿfar al-Ṣādiq," *Arabica* 50 (2003), 199–244. On Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, the sixth Twelver Imām, see Marshall G. S. Hodgson, art. Djaʿfar al-Ṣādiq" in *EI*², II (1965), 374–75.

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The present paper is based in the main on the following compositions:

- *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt fī faḍāʾil āl Muḥammad* by Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan ibn Farūkh al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/903).[6] Al-Ṣaffār was a contemporary of the tenth Imām, ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Hādī (d. 254/868).[7] and the eleventh, Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī (d. 260/874).[8] The book's value for the purposes of the present paper lies mainly in the fact that it contains some very early Shīʿite traditions.
- *Kitāb al-kharāʾij wa-l-jarāʾiḥ*[9] by Quṭb al-Dīn Saʿīd ibn Hibat Allāh al-Rāwandī (d. 573/1177–78).[10] the teacher of Ibn Shahrāshūb. This is a composition devoted entirely to miracles associated with Imāms.
- *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib*[11] by Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192). Ibn Shahrāshūb was reputed to have been the greatest Shīʿite scholar of his time and was held in high esteem by Sunnīs as well. The work consists of biographies of Imāms; some of the chapters devoted to each Imām deal with the miracles associated with him.
- *Biḥār al-anwār*[12] by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1110/1598),[13] who lived in Iṣfahān and spent the larger part of his life collecting Shīʿite traditions. In the year 1686 Persia's Ṣafawid ruler appointed him *shaykh al-islām* of Iṣfahām, a position of authority that enabled him to do much to further the cause of Twelver Shīʿism. The book in question consists of traditions gleaned from many different sources and historical periods, including the first three books listed above, providing us with an opportunity to compare different versions of traditions that appear in more than one of the compositions.

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[6]) For details see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (m. 290/902–3) et son *Kitāb Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt*," *Journal asiatique* 280 (1992), 223–24.

[7]) Cf. Dwight M. Donaldon, *The Shiʿite Religion: a History of Islam in Persia and Iraq* (London, 1933), 209–16.

[8]) For details see Bernard Lewis, art. "al-ʿAskarī, Abū l-Ḥasan" in *EI*², VII (1993), 443.

[9]) On this work see Aghā Buzurg al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa ilā taṣānīf al-shīʿa* (Najaf, 1936–48/Tehran, 1941–78), VII, 145–46.

[10]) For details see Muḥsin al-Amīn, *Aʿyān al-shīʿa* (Beirut, 1961), XXXV, 16–24.

[11]) On this book see al-Ṭihrānī, *Dharīʿa*, XXII, 318–29.

[12]) See *ibid.*, III, 16–27; Etan Kohlberg, art. "Beḥār al-Anwār" in *EIr*, IV (1985), 90–93.

[13]) For details see Hairi Abdul-Hadi, art. "al-Madjlisī" in *EI*², VII (1993), 1086–88.

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Below we have classified traditions in which lions play a significant role into four groups, using as our main criterion the nature of the miraculous deed and, as a secondary consideration, also the chronological order of the Imāms in question, wherever that has been feasible. Whenever a number of different traditions repeat one and the same story without adding anything of importance to the report of the miracle itself or to the powers ascribed to the Imām, we have relegated the reference to the footnotes, while a small number have not been mentioned at all.

In what follows we shall describe and analyze miracles associated with Shīʿite Imāms in which lions play a major role, and attempt to answer the following questions:

- What kinds of miracles involve lions as a significant element?
- What are the characteristics of the lion in these miracles?
- What roles do lions play in the miracles in question?
- What are the characteristics of the Imāms in these miracles?

Before discussing these points let us briefly survey what the classical Arabic sources have to say about lions.

Lions in Classical Arabic Sources

Not many works have been written about lions. However, our examination has revealed that this animal has received considerable attention in classical Arab culture, as attested by the very many mentions of it, beginning in the pre-Islamic period (*Jāhilīya*), which ended with Muḥammad's successful career in the seventh century CE.

The lion occupies pride of place in Arabic poetry, the main literary genre of classical Arabic literature; many poetry collections contain descriptions of animals, and in particular of lions. The lion is also mentioned in traditions quoting the Prophet, in the Qurʾān, and in Arabic fables.

But why the lion more than other animals? It would appear that Shīʿite writers showed a preference for the lion as the largest of the land predators, "king of the beasts", a symbol of power and authority, or pride and beauty, an animal with a fearful roar and senses that are superior to those of man. Shīʿite writers anthropomorphized the lion and placed it next to the Imāms themselves. Its power and courage were mobilized to compel obedience and loyalty to the Imāms, to serve them, to protect them from enemies and to punish anyone who dared to call into question their right to their office.

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Lions in Shīʿite literature are deemed to have occult knowledge; they reveal this to the Imāms in speech, which the Imām understands. The lion serves as the Imām's mount, enabling him to travel great distances in a short time. The Imām uses the lion for difficult and dangerous missions; the lion is the Imām's friend and is always ready to do his bidding. At times the lion is even described as behaving like an Imām. The Imām can turn a picture of a lion into a real one in order to prove to doubters that he is indeed the true Imām, and also in order to take vengeance on his enemies.

In fact, even when the Imām's enemies bring a lion in the hope that it will pounce on him, the lion identifies the Imām as such and not only refuses to harm him, but also befriends him and wishes him well. The lion wags its tail in joy at having met the Imām. In short, the lion guards and protects the Imām during the latter's lifetime and guards his grave after his death.

The lion thus serves to stress the importance of the principle of loyalty to the Imām (*walāya*); all who refuse to express such loyalty are punished. The deeds performed by the lion – serving the Imām, obeying his orders, bringing and guarding his treasures, taking the Imām quickly over long distances, protecting the Imām and his property – provide support for the principle of *walāya*.

In stories of miracles associated with Shīʿite Imāms, the symbol of the lion developed into an important means for punishing whoever refuses to give his allegiance to the Imām and for expressing the ideas of serving and protecting the Imām. A clear trend can be discerned of a desire to combat those who refuse to see in loyalty to the Imām a cultural value and ideal; the constant threats that Shīʿism had to face aroused a feeling of insecurity that encouraged the development of values of individual heroism and courage.

Shīʿite believers' feelings of insecurity increased during the Umayyad and ʿAbbāsid periods. The generations of uncertainty created a need for even greater support for and cultural loyalty towards the Imām, and prepared the ground for the emergence of stories about miracles and heroic deeds. As a rsult, earlier traditions about lions, derived from classical sources and even other cultural and ethnic groups, were transformed to serve the Shīʿites' social and cultural need to foster values of heroism and a belief in the Imāms' ability to perform miracles. In times of crisis and when feeling at a loss Shīʿites protected their existence and their values by mobilizing various genres in which lions played a prominent role, to answer their need for heroic deeds in the face of internal and external threats. Such traditions survived for many centuries, proof that they did indeed answer a real need. The transmitters of these traditions hold dis-

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tinct social, religious, or political interests and adapt the traditions they relate to the public towards which they are aimed.

It would seem that every geo-cultural region in the world has at one time or another during its historical cultural development chosen one particular animal out of those that existed in the area in question and created around it literary and folkloristic genres, ascribing to it various natural and supernatural characteristics. Thus the fox occupies an important position in Indian, African and European folklore and the wolf and bear in Europe, in ancient Greece and Egypt as well as in Arab culture in general; among Shīʿites in particular the lion was pre-eminent.

The Imām as Miracle-Worker

The ability to perform miracles is one of an Imām's distinguishing characteristics. In the view of Twelver Shīʿism miracles constitute proof that the person performing them is indeed a true Imām, deserving to be ranked as an equal to the prophets. Shīʿites, however, stop short of claiming that their Imāms are in fact prophets; nor do they contest Muḥammad's claim to have been the last of the prophets. So in order to be able to ascribe miracles (*muʿjizāt*) to the Imāms they were forced to cut the connection, insisted upon by Sunnīs, between miracles and prophecy. This they do by claiming that the purpose of miracles is not to prove that the person performing them is a prophet, but merely to prove any truthful assertion. Thus whereas prophetic miracles prove that a person is a prophet, Imāmic miracles prove the truth of the miracle-worker's claim to the Imāmate. Even those who did not view miracles as a necessary means for proving the identity of an Imām did not dispute the fact that Imāms did indeed perform miracles. According to this view, what distinguishes the prophet is his performance of miracles to prove his claim to prophecy, and not his miracle-performing powers themselves. This line of argument has enabled Shīʿism to ascribe the power to perform miracles to its Imāms without detracting from the unique status of the prophets.

Imāms also possess a number of other superhuman qualities that are not and cannot be found in anyone except ʿAlī and his Imām descendents from his wife Fāṭima. In the Shīʿite view these attributes are God's gift to a chosen few, picked out before heaven and earth were created. The Imāms are role models for the believers; they are immune from mistakes and sin; their position as leaders of the community makes them the successors of Muḥammad, the only difference between them being that the latter was a prophet, i.e. that unlike them he was the recipient of direct

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revelation in the form of visual and verbal communication with an angel (Gabriel in particular).[14]

The adoration of Imāms is naturally strongest among the Shīʿite masses, among whom beliefs abound about the wondrous abilities of their spiritual leaders: the Imāms are believed to speak all languages, to be able to communicate with animals, demons and plants; they can see what is behind them; they are able to heal and bring the dead back to life. Miracles are performed to convince those who refuse to swear fealty to the Imām.[15] Following this trend, Twelver Shīʿite hagiography has tended, as the Imāms physical presence receded even more from the believers' everyday live, to inflate their spiritual prowess and their miracle-working abilities.[16]

The miracles that an Imām can perform are of many different kinds: to revive the dead, speak to the dead, split a sea (or a river), transform one thing into another, reduce distances, speak to animals, plants and inanimate objects, heal deformities, bear hunger and thirst for a long time, see to very great distances and more. God protects Imāms from their enemies; they can make a small amount of food suffice to feed many people; they can appear under different guises and be in a number of places at one and the same time; animals obey them and God fulfils their requests. As we mentioned above, lions guarded some Imāms and some also rode on these wild beasts.

The eighth century CE saw the beginning of a tremendous outpouring of Arabic literary compositions after Arab culture had assimilated elements of the civilizations that had joined Islam. These intercultural transformations enriched Arab culture in the fields of science and philosophy following the translation into Arabic of major works of science from Greek and Persian. At this stage a literary-philosophical genre developed of compositions about animals, demonstrating the importance they possessed in Arab culture. Animals were perceived by Arabs as providing proof of the Creator's unlimited wisdom. Numerous Qurʾānic verses deal with animals and speak about man's superiority to them and human

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[14]) See Etan Kohlberg, "Shīʿa: ʿAlī's Faction," B, in *Protest and Revolution in Shīʿī Islam* (Tel-Aviv, 1976), 15 [Hebrew]; Meir Bar-Asher, *Issues in Early Twelver Shīʿite Qurʾān Interpretation*, unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Hebrew University (Jerusalem, 1991), 139 [Hebrew]; Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism: the Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, trans. David Streight (New York, 1994), 69–71, 91–94; Aḥmad Maḥmūd Ṣubḥī, *Naẓarīyat al-imāma ladā al-shīʿa al-ithnay ʿasharīya* (Cairo, 1969), 169.

[15]) Bar-Asher, *Issues*, 139.

[16]) *Ibid.*

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control of them. The literature about animals drew from many varied sources, such as classical Arabic poetry, the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* literature, as well as animal stories from other cultures that had been translated into Arabic, including in particular Aristotle's essays on animals that had been translated from Greek into Arabic.

Everyday life in the Arabian peninsula afforded constant contact with animals. These interactions caused the inhabitants to ascribe to each animal certain specific characteristics. The lion occupied an important position in the classical sources presented below, which provide detailed descriptions of the animal and its distinguishing features. Among these sources are the following:

- Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110/729), *Tafsīr al-aḥlām al-kabīr*
- Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. 142/759), *Kalīla wa-Dimna*
- al-Aṣmaʿī (d. 213(828), *Asmāʾ al-wuḥūsh wa-ṣifātuhā*
- al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869), *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*
- Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), *Kitāb al-maʿānī al-kabīr fī abyāt al-maʿānī*
- al-Khwārizmī (d. 381/992), *Mufīd al-ʿulūm wa-mubīd al-humūm*
- al-Maydānī (d. 518/1124), *Majmaʿ al-amthāl*
- al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1283), *ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt*
- Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311), *Lisān al-ʿarab*
- al-Damīrī (d. 808/1405), *Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān al-kubrā*
- al-Ibshīhī (d. 870/1466), *al-Mustaṭraf min kull fann mustaẓraf*

In classical Arabic sources lions are given numerous names and epithets. For example, in al-Aṣmaʿī's *Asmāʾ al-wuḥūsh wa-ṣifātuhā*, dedicated to the names, sounds and characteristics of animals, one will find many names for the lion. The many names and epithets of the lion (500 according to some, 1000 according to others)[17] are indicative of that beast's nature and behavior.

Still, most classical works use the common noun for lion in Arabic, *asad*, and mention other names and epithets only as additional words denoting the same animal. Most of these names are masculine, evidence of a positive attitude in Arab culture towards the animal to which the names

[17]) See Joseph Hell, art. "Asad" in *EI*[1], I (1927), 474. In the Old Testament there are six distinct words for the lion (*ari, aryeh, kefir, lavi, layish, shaḥal*); for further details see L. I. Rabinowitz, art. "Lion" in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York and London, n. d.), 262; M. M. Kaplan, *The Lion in the Hebrew Bible: a Study of a Biblical Metaphor*, unpublished Ph. D. thesis (Brandeis University, 1981), 20–114.

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refer, at least according to the hypothesis that the Arabic language and Arab culture favor males and the masculine gender. Another interesting feature of the names is that many of them have the structure *abū* + noun, identical to the common Arabic agnomen consisting of the word *abū*, "father of …", and the first-born son's name. Among such names for the lion are the following: Abū l-Ḥārith, Abū l-Shibl, Abū l-Ashbāl, Abū Ḥafṣ Abū l-Zaʿfarān, Abū l-ʿAbbās, Abū l-Firās, Abū l-Abṭāl and others.

These agnomina are identical with those used for humans; in Arabic such forms are quite commonly used to indicate certain personal qualities of the epithets' possessors. Their use as names of lions is evidence of a tendency by humans to personify the lion.[18] Arabs in antiquity adored animals, occasionally deified them, and frequently spoke about them. Names of animals were often used as personal or tribal names out of fear, admiration or a wish to acquire some of their character traits, such as strength, courage, cunning, and even beauty.

Small wonder, then, that Shīʿites show respect for the lion, hang pictures of lions inside their homes, and even place two statues of lions over the house entrance in the belief that these will protect them and their families and prevent evil spirits from entering their homes.[19] The pair of

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18) Robertson Smith was of the opinion that like other Semitic peoples, the Arabs used animal names out of a belief in totemism, the worship of animals believed to be the tribe's original forefathers and possessed of the spirit of a deity. He also ascribes to the Arabs the belief that human souls can be transformed into animal spirits and *vice versa*. One piece of evidence he adduces for his claims is that many Arab tribes are called by the name of a totem animal, including the lion (*asad*). He furthermore argues that early Arab society was matriarchal, and that the commonly accepted genealogy of the Arab tribes that goes back to Ishmael and Qaḥṭān is relatively recent, dating apparently from the first/seventh century. For further details see William Robertson Smith, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* (Cambridge, repr. 1966), 231.

19) A pair of lions over the entrance to Shīʿite houses is but the last link in an extremely long chain of "Oriental" lions, many of which possess common stylistic elements. In antiquity their function was to express the king's prestige and dignity (*hayba*) and also to protect him and prevent evil spirits from gaining entrance to the palace or temple. This is the reason for their fierce appearance. This function of theirs is described in an eighth-century BCE inscription from Tel Barsip in Mesopotamia. The lions at Parthian Warqa, and most probably those at Tepe Hisar, also had the same function. Over the centuries the figure of the guardian lion over the gate became a cliché. For further details see H. Targan, *Umayyad Sculpture at Khirbat al-Mafjar: Sources and Meanings*, unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Tel-Aviv University (Tel-Aviv, 1992), I, 191 [Hebrew].

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fierce-looking lions usually stands sideways, with large heads facing the visitor, mouths open and showing two prominent lower fangs. The manes look like intertwined snakes separated by deep incisions.

In Shīʿite art, too, lions appear more often than any other animal. Some also put the statue of a lion on tombstones. It is thus no coincidence that the lion with sword is the symbol of the emergency medical service ("Red Cross") in Iran.[20] Nor is it merely chance that many Shīʿites call their sons by names that mean "lion", including Ḥaydar, after a first name of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib,[21] also called Asad Allāh, "lion of God".[22] ʿAlī was known for his great courage and his fierce battle cries, which sounded like a lion's roar and instilled fear in the hearts of the enemy.[23] This may

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[20]) The lion and sword have been the political symbol of Persia from Sāsānid times (226–640 CE) until the overthrow of Shah Muḥammad Riḍā Pahlevī in 1979. After the Islamic Revolution Iranian clerics gave this symbol a new meaning: the sword now symbolized ʿAlī's sword *dhū l-fiqār*, and the lion became the lion of Karbalāʾ that guarded Ḥusayn's body and prevented the Umayyad troops from desecrating it after his murder. I am grateful to Shaykh Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Karbāssī for this information, which he was kind enough to provide when I called him in London on 29 April 2002.

[21]) The following story is told about why ʿAlī was called Ḥaydara. One day ʿAmr ibn Maʿdī Karib al-Sulamī (d. 21/642), who had heard of ʿAlī's prowess, wanted to challenge him to a duel. ʿAmr came to Medina and encountered ʿAlī while the latter was plowing. ʿAmr did not recognize him and so asked him where he could find ʿAlī. The latter replied: "The man whom you seek has a physique very much like mine." When ʿAmr expressed his scorn ʿAlī gave a great roar and ʿAmr fell off his horse to the ground. After he rose he said to ʿAlī: "I swear by God that you are indeed Ḥaydara; this I do not doubt," and then asked to become his servant. According to one tradition ʿAlī's servant Qanbar was none other than the afore-mentioned ʿAmr.

[22]) In Sunnī Islam the epithet "lion of God" belongs to Ḥamza ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib (d. 4/626), who demonstrated great heroism in the wars against the Prophet's enemies. It is related that in the Battle of Badr in 2/624 Ḥamza shouted out to the non-believers: "I am the lion of God; I am the lion of the Messenger of God, the Prophet Muḥammad." To this ʿUtba ibn Rabīʿa (d. 2/624) responded: "I am the lion of the allies who fight against the Prophet Muḥammad." For details on Ḥamza's epithet see, for example, ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Ismāʿīl al-Thaʿālibī, *Thimār al-qulūb fī muḍāf wa-l-mansūb*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl IBRĀHĪM (Cairo, 1977), 21.

[23]) H. KINDERMAN, art. "al-Asad" in *EI*², I (1960), 681–83. In his dictionary *Lisān al-ʿarab* Ibn Manẓūr relates that Fāṭima, the mother of ʿAlī, called him Ḥaydara because of her prior divine knowledge about his future prowess. He adds that she may also have called him "Lion" in memory of her father, whose name was Asad (also meaning "lion").

At the battle of Khaybar ʿAlī is reported to have approached a group of the enemy and declaimed the following three lines in *rajaz* verse:

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also explain why in the plays and parades held on the day of ʿĀshūrāʾ (the anniversary of the death of Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī[24]) lion-like dolls are held and carried by the marchers.

In Shīʿite mosques and *ḥusaynīya*s[25] Qurʾānic verses and sayings ascribed to the Imāms are inscribed on the walls in calligraphic imitation of a lion. Fresco paintings depicting lions are well-known among Shīʿites as well, as also are pictures of lions in manuscripts. On the graves of important Shīʿite clerics in Iran one can also occasionally find the statute of a lion[26] in the Sāsānid tradition.[27]

I am ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib; [in my cradle] my mother called me Ḥaydara.

I am [courageous] like the lion of the forest;

I shall smite them a hero's blows with my sword.

For further details see Jamāl al-Dīn ibn Manẓūr al-Miṣrī, *Lisān al-ʿarab* (Beirut, 1990), IV, 174 *s. v. ḥaydar*; also Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib*, III, 276.

In Jewish tradition Moses is described as being heroic like a lion; see, for example, Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold (Philadelphia, 1909–38), III, 335. Ahasuerus was called a lion by Esther as well; *ibid.*, IV, 472. The Shīʿites may well have taken the epithet of "lion" from Jewish traditions about Moses and applied it to ʿAlī with the necessary changes in order to ascribe to the latter the characteristics and prowess of a prophet.

[24]) The third Shīʿite Imām, son of ʿAlī, killed at the battle of Karbalāʾ in 61/680. See Laura Veccia Vaglieri, art. "Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib" in *EI*^{2}, IV (1990), 607–15.

[25]) The *ḥusaynīya*s are meeting halls where Shīʿites congregate on the anniversary of the death of Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī. They are to be found mainly in the major Shīʿite holy cities, such as Karbalāʾ and Najaf (both in Iraq), Mashhad and Qumm (in Iran), and elsewhere. They also serve as hostels for the pilgrims to Shīʿite shrines, in particular in the cities of Karbalāʾ and Najaf. They are frequently named after the place of origin of those who financed their construction, e. g. Ḥusaynīyat al-iṣfāhānīyīn, "Hostel of the People of Iṣfāhān". The purity laws of mosques do not apply to *ḥusaynīya*s.

The origin of the *ḥusaynīya*s may lie in the fact that initially mosques were under the control of of anti-Shīʿite rulers who prevented Shīʿites from openly performing their rites and ceremonies.

*Ḥusaynīya*s are called by a number of different names in India: "Imam Barch", "al-Takīya", "Gharkhāna", and so on; in Central Asia they are called "Shīʿite mosques". For further details see, for example, Jawād Muḥaddithī, *Mawsūʿat ʿāshūrāʾ*, trans. Khalīl Zāmil al-ʿIṣāmī (Beirut, 1997), 142–43.

[26]) I would like to thank Dr. Ismāʿīl Shafaq from the Abū ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā University in Iran for clarifying these points. In an interview Dr. Shafaq gave in Tunis on 8 April 2002 he explained that he believed the lion to symbolize God overpowering injustice.

[27]) See n. 19 above.

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Lions play an important part in Shīʿite literature, in particular in descriptions of miracles performed by Imāms, in life and also after death. Below we shall survey the various traditions involving lions and Imāms' miracles, as follows:

- Language and speech
- Prophecies of Ḥusayn's death and weeping over his grave
- The lion as mount and pack animal
- Pictures of lions that produce real beasts
- Repelling, cursing and killing of the Imām's enemies

Language and Speech

It is related that al-Ḥārith al-Aʿwar[28] said:

> We were a number of people with the Commander of the Faithful[29] ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib[30] in a place called al-Kunāsa[31] when suddenly a lion came out of a nearby wood. The people who saw the lion ran every which way. The lion approached and stood before ʿAlī, who placed his hand on the lion's head, between his ears, and said to him: "Return to your place with the permission of God, and from this day on do not enter the *dār al-hijra*." ʿAlī then added: "Tell all the lions in my name that they must not come to or enter the city of al-Kūfa." When ʿAlī finished speaking the lion departed and disappeared.[32]

In this tradition the lion recognizes ʿAlī and approaches him, but does not attack; ʿAlī exhibits no fear, caresses the lion's mane and speaks to it; the lion understands what ʿAlī says and obeys him. The lion here possesses

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[28]) For details on him see Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī* (Tehran, 1994), 94; al-Ḥasan ibn Yūsuf ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Muṭṭahar, known as al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī, *Rijāl al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī* (Qumm, 1990), 54 no. 8; Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Kashshī, *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, ed. Ḥasan al-Muṣṭafawī (Mashhad, 1929), 88–89 nos. 142–43.

[29]) One of the titles of a caliph, emphasizing his military functions. According to traditional accounts it came into being during the caliphate of the second caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13–23/634–44), and quickly became the most commonly used title for caliphs. However, in Shīʿite usage it refers exclusively to ʿAlī, never to ʿUmar.

[30]) On him see Laura Veccia Vaglieri, art. "ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib" in *EI*², I (1960), 381–86; Ismael K. Poonawala, art. "ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib" in *EIr*, I (1985), 642.

[31]) The name of a locality in al-Kūfa; see Shihāb al-Dīn Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān* (Beirut, 1979), IX, 481 *s. v.* "Kunāsa".

[32]) Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharā'ij wa-l-jarā'iḥ* (Qumm, 1988), I, 191–92.

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both animal and human traits. ʿAlī's ability to understand the lion and make both beast and humans do his bidding enable him to serve in a sense as a mediator between the two worlds of men and beasts. From this and other traditions of this kind we also learn that it is not only humans who are duty-bound to obey the Imām.

In another tradition al-Barqī[33] reports that a lion once entered the city of al-Kūfa and spoke to its people, demanding: "Please guide me and take me to ʿAlī, Commander of the Faithful." The frightened Kūfans led the lion to ʿAlī. The lion approached him, stared at him, ran towards him and demonstrated his desire to be protected by him. ʿAlī caressed it, patted its back, and then said: "Leave!", whereupon the lion lowered its head, raised its tail to its neck and left the city without a sideways look.[34] As in the preceding tradition the lion here is given human traits: it speaks to the people of al-Kūfa, understands their answer, identifies ʿAlī, recognizes him as the Imām and as his superior, and makes it possible for ʿAlī to perform a wonder.

The following tradition, reported by Rashīd ibn Mazyad,[35] has a lion informing the Imām Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī on the extent of the support he has among the people of al-Kūfa: "I accompanied Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī and his men[36] when they left Medina on their way to al-Kūfa in Iraq. When we came to a place called Quṭquṭāna[37] near al-Kūfa I asked Ḥusayn to be

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[33]) His full name is Abū ʿAbd Allāh Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Barqī. See al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 384; Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, ed. Muḥammad Jawād al-Naʾīnī (Qumm, 1986), 86 no. 182; Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Barqī, *Kitāb al-rijāl* (Tehran, 1963), 58–59.

[34]) al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharāʾij wa-l-jarāʾiḥ*, I, 198. Similar traditions are found in Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib*, IV, 236, 288, 303–304. See also al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, XVII, 412; XLI, 231; Ḥasan ibn Abī Ḥasan al-Daylamī, *Irshād al-qulūb* (Qumm, 1991), II, 277.

[35]) I have not been able to identify this person.

[36]) In Shīʿite writings the companions of Ḥusayn on his journey from the Ḥijāz to Karbalāʾ are called *aṣḥāb al-Ḥusayn*, the "comrades of Ḥusayn", consisting of 82 women, 60 small children and 72 men, all family members or close friends. See, for example, ʿAlī Muḥammad ʿAlī Dukhayyil, *Aṣḥāb al-Ḥusayn ʿalayhi al-salām* (Beirut, 1985); also Muḥammad ibn al-Shaykh Ṭāhir al-Samāwī, *Ibṣār al-ʿayn fī anṣār al-Ḥusayn* (Qumm, n.d.); al-Faḍīl ibn Zubayr ibn ʿUmar al-Kūfī al-Asadī, *Tasmiyat man qutila maʿa Ḥusayn*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍā al-Ḥusaynī (Qumm, 1406/1985), 127–62.

[37]) The name of a place near al-Kūfa, towards the desert, in a region known as al-Ṭaff, site of a prison built by king al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir (d. 312 CE). See Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, IV, 374.

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allowed to return to Medina. He gave me permission, and then I saw a fierce lion coming from the direction of al-Kūfa and welcoming Ḥusayn, who spoke to it and asked it whether the people of al-Kūfa supported his claim to be caliph. The lion replied to him: "The hearts of the people of al-Kūfa are with you, but their swords are against you."[38]

Ḥusayn then asks the lion: "Whom did you leave behind in [charge of] al-Kūfa?" The lion replies: "ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād (d. 67/686)[39] rules al-Kūfa now and has already killed your cousin Muslim ibn ʿAqīl (d. 61/580)."[40] Ḥusayn goes on to ask: "Where are you headed?," and the lion answers: "To the city of Aden in Yemen." Ḥusayn then turns to a more immediate issue: "Oh lion, do you know how we may approach the Euphrates River next to al-Kūfa?" The lion replies: "I know nothing that you do not know, for all the knowledge that we lions possess comes from you; you are the one who has provided us with it." The lion thereupon leaves Ḥusayn and continues on its way, reciting the Qurʾānic verse: "And thy Lord is not at all a tyrant to His slaves."[41] Ḥusayn then says: "This is indeed a wonder, a miracle performed by God's friend, the son of God's friend."[42]

This tradition bear's a number of noteworthy features: a chance encounter between the lion and the Imām, a dialogue in which both sides understand each other, and finally, Ḥusayn's request for help in finding the Euphrates River.

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[38]) According to another tradition the incident involved the poet al-Farazdaq (Hammām ibn Ghālib, d. 115/733). In this version again Ḥusayn and his men were on their way from the Ḥijāz to Iraq, and when they encountered the poet along the way, one of Ḥusayn's men, al-Ḥurr ibn Yazīd al-Riyāḥi (d. 61/680), asked what the people of Iraq thought about Ḥusayn's claim to the caliphate. To this al-Farazdaq answered: "The hearts of the people of Iraq are with you, but their swords are against you." It would thus appear that later Shīʿite writers took the kernel of this story and added the lion in order to stress Ḥusayn's supernatural abilities, one of which was his ability to communicate with beasts. For details about the encounter between Ḥusayn and al-Farazdaq, see, for example, Abū Mikhnaf Lūṭ ibn Yaḥyā, *Maqtal Ḥusayn* (Tehran, n.d.).

[39]) Governor of al-Baṣra during the reign of Muʿāwiya; later the caliph Yazīd appointed him to the post of governor of al-Kūfa. See Etan Kohlberg, art. "ʿUbayd Allād ibn Ziyād" in *EI*^{2}, XI (2000), 763–64.

[40]) For details on him see Etan Kohlberg, art. "Muslim ibn ʿAqīl" in *EI*^{2}, VII (1993), 688–91.

[41]) Q. 41:46.

[42]) Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Rustum al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalāʾil al-imāma* (Qumm, 1992), 182.

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Prophecies of Ḥusayn's Death and Weeping over His Grave

A number of traditions[43] tell of a lion who predicts the future death of Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī. In one such tale it is related that Jesus used to walk in forests and deserts with his disciples, fasting and worshipping God. One day he and his disciples arrived in Karbalā,[44] where they were surprised by a lion lying in the middle of the road. The lion bared his teeth and showed his enmity towards them but did not roar. Jesus then asked the lion: "Why do you prevent us from passing?", whereupon the lion answered in clear human language: "I will not let you pass until you curse Yazīd,[45] the murderer of Ḥusayn." Jesus then asked the lion: "Who is this Ḥusayn?", and the lion answered: "His killer is cursed; the wild beasts, lions and wolves in particular, curse him on the Day of ʿĀshūrāʾ."[46] Jesus then raised his hands to heaven and cursed Yazīd, whereupon the lion moved out of the way and allowed Jesus and his disciples to continue on their way.[47]

In this tale a lion with human characteristics knows the ultimate fate awaiting Ḥusayn; in a sense he is the guardian of the place where the Imām will eventually be killed and buried. The lion, who asks prophets and messengers to curse the future murderers, speaks the language of human beings, knows the future, and recognizes Jesus as a prophet. His peaceful behavior towards the latter is another example of the idea that lions are the friends of God and do not attack prophets, Imāms or saints; to the contrary, they will always defend members of this group against their enemies. This tradition presents the killing of Ḥusayn as a

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[43]) For details on this tradition see (al-Fāḍil al-Dardabandī)Āghā ibn ʿĀbid al-Shīrawānī al-Ḥāʾirī, *Iksīr al-ʿibādāt fī asrār al-shahādāt, al-maqtal al-mulimm bi-maʾsāt al-Ḥusayn*, ed. Shaykh Muḥammad Jumʿa Bādī and ʿAbbās Mullā ʿAṭīya al-Jamrī (al-Manāma, Bahrayn, 1994), I, 267–68.

[44]) A town about 100 km southwest of Baghdad and the place where Ḥusayn was killed by the Umayyads. See Ernest Honigmann, art. "Karbalāʾ" in *EI*², VII (1993), 688–91.

[45]) The second Umayyad caliph (r. 60–63/680–83), son of the dynasty's founder Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān. Ḥusayn was killed during his reign. See Gerald R. Hawting, art. "Yazīd (I) ibn Muʿāwiya" in *EI*², XI (2002), 309–11.

[46]) The tenth of the month of Muḥarram, the day when Ḥusayn would die. On ʿĀshūrāʾ see my article "ʿĀshūrāʾ Day and Yom Kippur," *Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 38 (2001), 200–11; Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* (The Hague, 1978); P. H. Marçais, art. "ʿĀshūrāʾ" in *EI*², I (1960), 705.

[47]) See n. 41 above.

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wrongful murder that had been fated to occur long before it actually happened.[48]

Jesus and his disciples are presented here in a positive light, as believers in the Shīʿite creed and in Ḥusayn's rightful position as Imām. The tradition itself is relatively late (the tenth century CE), but reflects a long-standing Shīʿite belief that Jesus, who lived many centuries before the event, was loyal to the Imām and cursed his killers. The tradition also serves to emphasize the antiquity of the idea of *walāya*, or loyalty to the Imām, which in this view goes back much further in time than the appearance of Shīʿism itself.[49]

This is not the only tradition emphasizing the antiquity of Shīʿite ideas. In fact, many Shīʿite writers provide evidence that the unlawful and unjust killing of Ḥusayn was an event that had been decreed even before Creation itself. This is part of a more general tendency to present proofs that various tenets of Shīʿite dogma had been recognized millennia before the appearance of Shīʿism. Thus, for example, the Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 113/731)[50] is reported to have said that every prophet sent by God "was faithful to us (i. e. to the Twelver Shīʿite Imāms) and absolutely rejected our opponents."[51]

Another tradition tells of a lion that visited the tomb of the Imām ʿAlī in the city of al-Kūfa.[52] A group of people had gone out at night in order

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[48]) It is a commonplace in Shīʿite literature that Ḥusayn's martyrdom was known before Creation. See Khalil SINDAWI, *The Maqātil in Shīʿite Literature*, unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Bar-Ilan University (Ramat Gan, 2000), 240–42 [Hebrew].

[49]) The idea of the antiquity of the duty of devotion (*walāya*) to the Imām is frequently expressed by Shīʿite writers. Many traditions state that when men were still "shadows" (*aẓilla*) they were already exhorted to express this devotion. Other traditions explain the disasters that befell various groups of people before the birth of Shīʿism as God's punishment for their refusal to pledge their allegiance to the Shīʿite Imāms, and in particular to ʿAlī. In fact, even Adam's expulsion from the Garden of Eden is explained by his refusal to swear fealty to the members of the "Sacred Five"; and Jonah was thrown into the sea and into the belly of the whale because he would not express loyalty to ʿAlī. For further details see, for example, BAR-ASHER, *Issues*, 171–73.

[50]) This is the fifth Imām in Twelver Shīʿism. See Etan KOHLBERG, art. "Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn" in *EI*², VIII (1993), 379–400.

[51]) See Hichem DJAIT, art. "al-Kūfa" in *EI*², V (1986), 345; Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, ed. Mīrzā Kūtchebāghī AL-TABRĪZĪ (Qumm, 1983), 72 tradition no. 1, 74 tradition nos. 1–2; also Meir BAR-ASHER, "The Banū Isrāʿīl as a Model for Shīʿism," *al-Karmal* 18–19 (1997–98), 57–58 [Arabic].

[52]) A city in southern Iraq; see DJAIT, "al-Kūfa."

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to pay a clandestine visit to the tomb.[53] When they arrived some began reciting verses of the Qurʾān while others performed the *ziyāra* (pilgrimage) ceremonies. Suddenly a lion appeared before them. While they all cringed in a corner of the shrine the lion, whose feet were injured, approached the grave and rubbed his paws against it. After a while the lion departed, his wounds healed, and the pilgrims resumed their worship.[54]

In this story we see again some of the elements already discussed with respect to the previous tradition: a lion that does not attack humans and that reveres the Imām and recognizes the latter's power to heal even after death.

Weeping over the Imām Ḥusayn[55]

In the following tradition a member of the Banū Asad tribe[56] is reported to have said: "When Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī and his men were killed at Karbalāʾ, and after the Umayyad troops had left the battlefield where Ḥusayn's body lay unburied, a lion would come every night from the direction of the *qibla* (the direction of prayer, the Kaʿba in Mecca), stand by the body all night and leave at dawn." One tribesman did not believe the story and went to Karbalāʾ to see for himself. As night fell he saw the lion approach the body and weep over it; the lion would wipe its head and face

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53) Throughout the entire Umayyad period (41–132/661–750) and for most of the ʿAbbāsid period as well, Shīʿites were forbidden to visit ʿAlī's shrine and pilgrimages were of necessity clandestine. See Khalid Sindawi, "The Two Ghariyy Towers in Kūfa and the Tomb of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib in Shīʿite Literature," *al-Karmal* 23–24 (2003), 129–30 [Arabic].

54) See al-Daylamī, *Irshād al-qulūb*, II, 436.

55) In the *maqtal al-Ḥusayn* literature various beasts (Ḥusayn's steed, whales, animals in the desert) weep for Ḥusayn; birds mourned and did not eat on the day of his death, pigeons cursed his murderers, and owls have not shown themselves in daylight since that day. The idea of nature mourning over the death of a god, prophet, king or imam is a common motif in popular literature. The ancient Babylonians wrote many poems mourning the death of Tammuz in which nature is described as dying as well, and in Greek mythology, in which Tammuz is replaced by Adonis, it is told that with the latter's death nature died and dried up as well. In Ḥusayn's case it would appear that beasts were "mobilized" as a means of stressing his sublime character. For more on the motif of animals weeping over Ḥusayn, see Sindawi, *Maqātil*, 208–10.

56) On the tribe of the Banū Asad, see Werner Caskel, art. "Asad" in *EI*², I (1960), 683–84.

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in Ḥusayn's blood and roar;[57] voices were also heard from underground. The narrator then added: "These voices were none other than those of demons' wives weeping over Ḥusayn's death." He spoke to the demons' wives and said to them: "There is a lion sitting next to Ḥusayn's body." The wives answered that they saw the lion, and they asked the narrator if he knew who the lion was. He said that he did not know, whereupon they said: "This lion is Ḥusayn's father, ʿAlī son of Abū Ṭālib, who is embodied in the form of a lion."[58]

The lion in this tradition has received the appellation *asad Karbalā'*, "the lion of Karbalā'", perhaps as a reminder that this site has been consecrated since Creation because of Ḥusayn's future passion, and that God placed the lion there in remote antiquity to prevent anyone, be he even a prophet, from passing through without cursing the future murderer(s) of Ḥusayn. This tradition is the source of the Shīʿite custom of performing plays in which the story of Ḥusayn's death is retold on the Day of ʿĀshūrā'; for these celebrations large lion-shaped dolls are made and many wear lion masks and/or clothes in the color of a lion's skin, as a reminder of the role that a lion played on the day of Ḥusayn's death.[59]

Guarding Ḥusayn's Corpse

It is related that after Ḥusayn's death the commander of the Umayyad forces ordered his troops to trample on Ḥusayn's body with their horses' hooves. At that moment a woman by the name of Faḍḍa al-Nūbīya,[60] the

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[57]) This tradition appears in other sources as well, with some changes in the details. See, for example, Muḥammad Taqī Safar, *Nāsikh al-tawārīkh* (Tehran, 1889), IV, 23.

[58]) Fāḍil al-Dardabandī quotes al-Ṭabṭabā'ī's assertion that this tradition was patently false and that it is inconceivable that Shīʿite scholars would disseminate a story in which ʿAlī appears in the form of a lion, a beast of prey unsuited to represent the image of a man, the most sublime and beautiful of creations, as proven by the Qur'ānic verse (95:4): "We have indeed created man in the best of moulds." See al-Dardabandī, *Iksīr al-ʿibādāt*, III, 156 n. 2.

[59]) See, for example, Muḥaddithī, *Mawsūʿat ʿāshūrā'*, 40.

[60]) The servant woman of the Prophet's daughter was a beautiful black woman, famous for her elegant sermons. A tradition reports that the Prophet taught her the following incantation: "He is the One, none is like Him, no one; You make all perish and destroy every one; there is none beside You; You sit on Your throne; You never sleep." Faḍḍa used this incantation to perform various difficult deeds. One tradition relates that Fāṭima sent her to collect wood in the forest;

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servant of Fāṭima,[61] who was with Ḥusayn's wives, sisters and aunts, approached Zaynab and said to her: "My lady, I can call a lion to protect the body of Ḥusayn from the Umayyad soldiers. The Prophet Muḥammad taught me a call that will enable me to summon a lion forthwith." Zaynab gave her permission to do so. Faḍḍa then went to a nearby forest[62] and spoke with a lion, who proceeded to Ḥusayn's body, lay his paws on it, smeared his head with his blood and cried. He remained thus until dawn. When the Umayyad army came on the next day, headed by Ibn al-Akhnas,[63] and approached Ḥusayn's body, they saw the lion and fled in terror.[64]

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since the wood she collected was too heavy for her to carry, she pronounded the incantation taught to her by the Prophet and a man of Bedouin origin came along and carried the wood for her to Fāṭima's house. Another case is the one reported here in the text: Faḍḍa used the incantation to call the lion that protected Ḥusayn's body from the Umayyad troops. For further details see Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Aʿlamī al-Ḥāʾirī, *Tarājim aʿlām al-nisāʾ* (Beirut, 1987), 363–67; also Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Iṣāba fī tamyīz al-ṣaḥāba*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī (Beirut, 1992), VIII, 75.

61) The Prophet's daughter and ʿAlī's wife. See Laura Veccia Vaglieri, art. "Fāṭima" in *EI*², II (1965), 841–50.

62) Another tradition relates that ʿAlī's daughter Zaynab was the one who went to Ibn Saʿd's troops and that she called the lion to come and guard Ḥusayn's body. See al-Dardabandī, *Iksīr al-ʿibādāt*, III, 147; Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb ibn Isḥāq al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* (Tehran, 1945), I, 465.

63) There is some doubt as to his name. According to some sources it was al-Akhnas ibn Marthad, while others claim it was Marthad ibn ʿAlqama al-Ḥaḍramī. For further details see Raḍī l-Dīn ʿAlī ibn Mūsā Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Malhūf ʿalā qatlā al-ṭulūf*, ed. Fāris Tabrīziyān "al-Ḥassūn" (Qumm, 1993), 56–58.

64) In the traditions recorded by Ibn Ṭāwūs there is no mention of a lion; indeed, he reports that Ḥusayn's body was trampled by ten men ordered to do so by ʿUmar ibn Saʿd, the Umayyad commander. See Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Malhūf*, 56–58; al-Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, I, 465. To this day in Karbalāʾ there is a site called *maqām asad wa-Faḍḍa*, where the two supposedly met; a side road (*ʿiqd* in the local dialect) is called *ʿiqd Faḍḍa al-asad*, the "Faḍḍa and Lion Road". In past centuries many Shīʿite pilgrims to Karbalāʾ have reported being accosted by a lion that, after they had pronounced Faḍḍa's incantation, kept its distance from them and did them no harm. I would like to thank Shaykh Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Karbāssī for the information he provided in a telephone conversation from London on 29 April 2002.

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The Lion as Mount and Pack Animal

Al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar[65] is quoted as the authority for a story reporting that the ʿAbbāsid caliph Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr[66] sent the Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq on a mission to the city of al-Kūfa. There the Imām met al-Mufaḍḍal and asked him to join him. Al-Mufaḍḍal agreed and the two of them decided to continue on their way after nightfall. When darkness fell and al-Mufaḍḍal came to the Imām they saw two lions standing in front of them. Al-Ṣādiq put his hands on his companion's eyes and tied something around them so that he would not see the Imām's miracle and report it, since this would put the Imām and his followers in danger. He then put him on the back of one of the lions and he rode the other one.[67] They rode all night, and in the morning they arrived at the home of al-Ṣādiq in Medina.[68]

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[65]) His full name was Abū ʿAbd Allāh (or Abū Muḥammad) al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar al-Juʿafī. He was a resident of al-Kūfa and according to some belonged to the *khaṭṭābīya* sect. See al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, II, 359–60.

[66]) The second ʿAbbāsid caliph, r. 136–58/754–75. On him see Hugh Kennedy, art. "al-Manṣūr" in *EI*^{2}, VI (1991), 427–28.

[67]) There is a venerable and oft-quoted saying in Arabic, *rākib al-asad*, "lion-rider", which is used to refer to a particularly respected person. It is quite possible, then, that the tradition about the Imām riding the lion uses this motif in order to convey the idea that the Imām deserves the respect of the people. For more on this saying and its usage, see al-Thaʿālibī, *Thimār al-qulūb*, 383.

[68]) al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il al-imāma*, 269–70. The motif of riding on a lion can be found in tales about a number of popular heroes in Arabic literature. Here is one example, from a collection of tales about Zīr Sālim. Once upon a time a man named Kulayb, who was ill, asked al-Zīr Sālim to bring him water from the Well of Lions, since his physicians told him that in this way he would be healed. Al-Zīr acceded to his request and rode his ass to the Well of Lions. When he arrived there was only a single lion near the well; it was asleep and had its paw in its mouth. Al-Zīr said: "The lion is asleep. It would be cowardly of me to kill it now." So he tied his ass to the well and went down into the well to fill his water skin. While he was down in the well the ass brayed, waking the lion, which proceeded to pounce on the ass and eat it. When al-Zīr came out of the well and discovered what had happened he went up to the lion and swore to him that he would make him carry the water skins in place of the ass. The lion pounced on al-Zīr, but the latter struck the lion with his stick and threw him on the ground, approached him, put reins and a saddle on the beast, loaded his water skins and rode the lion back to his tribe. He then dismounted and cut the lion's head off with his sword. For details see *Qiṣṣat al-Zīr Sālim Abū Layla al-Muhalhal al-kabīr* (Beirut, n.d.), 39–40.

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In this case the Imām hides the miracle he performs, in the spirit of wonders performed by saints. As we shall see, this is the only case of a miracle performed by an Imām in which a lion is involved and the wondrous deed is done at night and in secret. The Imām in this case wanted to hide the miracle from the public, as do saints performing *karāmāt* ("wonders"). This tradition thus contains an element of prudent dissimulation (*taqīya*).[69]

We should point out here that usually the miracles performed by Imāms are of the overt kind, called *muʿjiza*; in this respect the Imāms are held to be akin to prophets rather than to saints. Imāms and prophets, according to the Shīʿite view, perform *muʿjizāt* that can be observed by others in order to convince unbelievers or doubters; therefore they would be going against God's will if they hid these deeds. Saints, on the other hand, perform wonders (*karāmāt*) for the sake of God only, and exposing them to public view would be considered an act of self-aggrandizement running counter to God's wish. The difference between a miracle (*muʿjiza*) and a wonder (*karāma*) thus does not lie in the character of the deed, but only in whether or not the performer possesses the prophetic spirit. In Shīʿite writings the term *karāma* is therefore never used to describe a miracle performed by an Imām,[70] since Shīʿism considers its Imāms as indistinguishable from prophets.[71] In the present case, however, the Imām

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A later story about riding a lion concerns the famous Ṣūfī shaykh Muḥammad Ḥijāzī al-Asadī (d. 977/1569), who was born in Iraq but lived in Safed in the Galilee region of Palestine and fought against the Turks who conquered the land at the beginning of the sixteenth century under Sultan Selīm. The shaykh was on his way from Safed to the village of Dayr al-Biʿna. He stopped by a spring on the way and there a lion pounced on his ass and ate it. But the shaykh grabbed the lion and rode it to Dayr al-Biʿna. From that day he was called Muḥammad al-Asad and the name of the village became Dayr al-Asad.

According to Maḥmūd Ḥijāzī this story typifies the powers which Sufi shaykhs were believed to possess. Very probably the story originated with local people after the shaykh's death. For further details see Maḥmūd Ḥijāzī, *Maqām al-shaykh Muḥammad al-Asad*, MA thesis, Bar-Ilan University (Ramat-Gan, 1984), 22 [Hebrew].

69) For more on this principle, hiding one's true religious beliefs in times of danger, see R. Strothmann, art. "Taḳīya" in *EI*², X (2000), 134–36. On the concept of *taqīya* in Twelver Shīʿism see Etan Kohlberg, "Some Imāmī Shīʿī Views on Taqiyya," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95 (1975), 395–402; repr. in Etan Kohlberg, *Belief and Law in Imami Shiʿism* (Aldershot, 1991).

70) Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, 91.

71) Loebenstein, "Miracles in Šīʿī Thought," 210. The Sunnīs believe that a *muʿjiza* is proof that its performer is a true prophet.

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hides the miracle he performs, in the manner of a saint: perhaps early Shīʿite writers did not draw the same sharp distinction between miracle and wonder that would characterize a later age.[72]

In the tradition under discussion the Imām is portrayed as fearless in the face of the lion and the lion as docile in his presence. The events themselves are described without supernatural embellishments, although the effect of riding the lion is of course that limitations of distance do not apply to the Imām.

The entire scene is strongly reminiscent of the Prophet's nocturnal journey[73] on his mount *al-burāq*,[74] thus providing yet another link between the powers of the Imām and those of the Prophet. According to Muslim tradition the Prophet's journey took place on the 27th of Rajab in the third year before the *hijra*, i.e. in 619 CE. Tradition describes the Prophet's mount as a white beast that was part ass and part mule, with two eagle wings, a woman's face and a peacock's tail. This animal took the Prophet by night to Jerusalem and returned him to Mecca after his ascension to heaven. There are a number of similarities between the journey of the Prophet and that of the Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq:

- In both, long distances (many hundreds of kilometers) are covered within a short time in a single night.
- The Prophet and the Imām each ride alone on a mount, the Prophet on *al-burāq* and the Imām on a lion.
- In both cases the rider's energy and dynamism are very clearly in evidence and affect the course of events.

Here too, as we have already seen above, Shīʿite writers have gone to considerable lengths to express the idea that their Imām has prophet-like powers, including an ability to perform miracles that equal or even surpass those of prophets. In the present story the Imām covers a greater

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[72]) On the difference between a miracle and a wonder see, for example, Taqī l-Dīn Ibn Taymīya, *al-Muʿjizāt wa-l-karāmāt wa-anwāʿ khawāriq al-ʿādāt wa-manāfiʿihā wa-maḍārrihā*, ed. Aḥmad AL-ʿĪSAWĪ (Cairo, 1990); also Fatḥ Allāh ibn Muḥammad Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, *al-Maqāmāt al-ʿalīya fī l-karāmāt al-jalīya*, ed. ʿIffat Wiṣāl HAMZA (Cairo, 1986), 9–11.

[73]) For further details on the Prophet's nocturnal journey see Jamel Eddine BENCHEIKH, *Le voyage nocturne de Mahomet* (Paris, 1988), 240; also ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, ed. Ṭāhā ʿAbd al-Raʾūf SAʿD (Beirut, n.d.), II, 234–44.

[74]) For details on this beast see Rudi PARET, art. "Burāḳ" in *EI*², I (1960), 1310–11.

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distance (at least one way) than the Prophet did on his night journey; *al-burāq* was brought to the Prophet by the angel Gabriel, whereas the lion appeared before the Imām by its own volition; the Imām was able to use an ordinary beast – a lion – in the same way as the Prophet did an extraordinary creature. All of these features point to the Shīʿite tendency to ascribe to their Imāms abilities that are at least equal to those of prophets, if not superior to them.

In another tradition it is related that a money purse destined for the Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq was given to al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar to transport. The Imām knew that al-Mufaḍḍal faced danger on this mission because there were robbers on the road. He therefore asked Abū Khālid al-Kābulī[75] (i.e. from the city of Kābul[76]) to take a cloth sash, go to the nearby thicket, place the sash on the ground and wait for lions to appear. The Imām added: "One of the lions will approach you and follow you to me." Abū Khālid was afraid, but the Imām assured him that the lions would not harm hin, and so he brought the lion to the Imām.

The lion stood motionless before the Imām, who spoke to him in a language that Abū Khālid was unable to understand. The Imām asked him: "What are you thinking of?" Abū Khālid answered: "I am thinking about how the lion is glorifying you." The lion then disappeared, only to reappear a short time later with the money purse between his teeth. The Imām then told Abū Khālid about al-Mufaḍḍal's dangerous mission: "Since there were robbers on the road who could have taken the purse," said the Imām, "I asked the lion to bring it to me."

Abū Khālid was sceptical, however, and said: "I find this hard to believe; I must speak first to al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar and then I shall know the truth." A few days later al-Mufaḍḍal arrived and told the Imām in Abū Khālid's presence that a lion had snatched the purse away from him. The Imām showed al-Mufaḍḍal the purse the lion had brought, and al-Mufaḍḍal confirmed that this was indeed the purse he had been carrying. He then asked Abū Khālid to go with the sash into the thicket again

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[75]) There existed two known people whose agnomen is Abū Khālid al-Kābulī: one, whose personal name is Wardān, is known as *al-aṣghar* ("the lesser"); another, whose personal name is Kankar, is known as *al-akbar* ("the greater"). For further details see al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 317 no. 4731–36. According to other sources there is only one such person, Wardān, whose epithet was Kankar; *ibid.*, 318 no. 4740–48; al-Ḥillī, *Rijāl*, 177 no. 3. He may have been a disciple of the fourth Imām, ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn (d. 95/713); see al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 120–23, 191–93.

[76]) On the city of Kābul, see C. E. Bosworth, art. "Kābul" in *EI*², IV (1990), 356–57; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, IV, 426, s.v. "Kābul".

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and bring the lion. When the lion arrived al-Mufaḍḍal identified him as well.[77]

In this tradition the Imām is portrayed as possessing the ability to call on the lion when the need arises. In is the Imām who initiates the encounter with the lion; he controls the lion and the lion obeys him and understands what he says. The two can communicate, and the lion refrains from attacking the Imām's companions and messengers.

Pictures of Lions That Produce Real Beasts

In three separate traditions three Imāms – Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, ʿAlī al-Riḍā[78] and ʿAlī al-Hādī – perform a similar miracle by turning painted images of lions into real ones. In one tradition Muḥammad ibn Sinān[79] reports:

> The ʿAbbāsid caliph Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr once invited 70 residents of Kābul and said to them: "You claim that you are magicians (*sāḥirūn*), that you have inherited your abilities from your forefathers in the days of Moses, and that you can separate a wife from her husband. Well, the Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq is a magician just like you. I shall invite him, and if your magic overpowers his I shall give you a great reward and much money." So they arose and by their magic produced a picture with 70 lions in it. The caliph then sat on his couch, put his crown on his head and asked his guards to bring in the Imām al-Ṣādiq. The Imām entered and, knowing what the magicians intended, raised his hands towards heaven and uttered incomprehensible words, some silently and others out loud. Then he turned to the people of Kābul and said to them: "Woe on you, for I can overcome your magic." He then gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion[80] and called out: "Oh *qaswara* ('lions'), devour them!"

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[77]) al-Ṭabarī, *Dalāʾil al-imāma*, 273–74; ʿAbbās al-Qummī, *Safīnat al-biḥār wa-madīnat al-ḥikam wa-l-āthār* (Beirut, n.d.). In Arabic literature the phrase "in the mouth of the lion" serves as a metaphor for something that is difficult or impossible to obtain. The fact that the Imām in our story easily takes the money pouch from the lion's mouth thus tells the Arabic reader that the Imām possesses powers that enable him to do with ease what would be difficult or impossible for ordinary men. For further details on this metaphor see, for example, al-Thaʿālibī, *Thimār al-qulūb*, 384.

[78]) The eighth Imām of Twelver Shīʿism, d. 203/818. See Bernard Lewis, art. "ʿAlī al-Riḍā" in *EI*², I (1960), 399–400.

[79]) On him see al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 389, 506–509 nos. 977–83, 582 nos. 1090–93; al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 328 no. 888.

[80]) In Jewish tradition Judah possessed a voice like a lion; it is not clear whether Shīʿite tradition in this case intended to make a connection between the Imām and Judah.

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> Suddenly every image of a lion turned into a real lion that jumped out of the picture, pounced on one of the people of Kābul and devoured him. In a few moments all 70 were devoured. Upon witnessing this the caliph fainted. When he regained consciousness he said to the Imām: "Take the lions away." He then added: "I shall never again doubt your status as an Imām." Al-Ṣādiq then made the lions return to the picture as before. The caliph also asked the Imām to restore the devoured people of Kābul, but the Imām answered him: "This is a wish that cannot be fulfilled."[81]

Another tradition tells of the Imām ʿAlī al-Riḍā who, when in the court of the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Maʾmūn,[82] was taunted by a group of the caliph's close companions, in particular a guard by the name of Ḥāmid ibn Mahrān. This group said to the Imām: "If you are truly an Imām then you should be able to turn the two lions that are painted on the prop of the caliph's guard into real beasts." The Imām was furious and addressed the two images: "Do what you want with this adulterer; devour him and leave no trace." Suddenly the lions became real, jumped out of the picture, pounced on the guard, crushed him and licked his blood in sight of the astonished group. When the lions were finished with the guard they approached the Imām and said: "Oh friend of God on earth, do you want us to devour the caliph al-Maʾmūn as we devoured his guard?" Upon hearing the lions say these words in the language of humans[83] the caliph fainted. The Imām al-Riḍā ordered the caliph's entourage to pour perfume on the ruler in order to revive him, and at the same time the lions continued to beg the Imām for permission to devour the caliph. But the Imām replied that God had already decided on the caliph's fate, which could not be changed. The two lions then asked the Imām: "Is there anything else you want of us?" The Imām answered: "Become pictures again as you were before." The two lions immediately turned into pictures, as they had been previously.[84]

The third tradition to be discussed under the present heading was reported by a man named Zurāra,[85] who related the following story. One

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[81]) al-Ṭabarī, *Dalāʾil al-imāma*, 299–300; al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharāʾij wa-l-jarāʾiḥ*, II, 399. See also ʿAlī ibn Yūnus al-Nabāṭī, *al-Ṣirāṭ* (al-Najaf, 1964), II, 138.

[82]) The seventh ʿAbbāsid caliph, r. 198–218/813–33. See M. Rekaya, art. "al-Maʾmūn ibn Hārūn al-Rashīd" in *EI*², VI (1991), 331–39.

[83]) al-Ṭabarī, *Dalāʾil al-imāma*, 381.

[84]) In the Old Testament the lion is represented as punishing those who do not believe in God. See, for example, Kaplan, *The Lion in the Hebrew Bible*, 124, 180; also I Kings 13:1–32, 20:35–43; II Kings 2:23–24.

[85]) A Shīʿite who served as the caliph al-Mutawakkil's personal secretary and chamberlain (*ḥājib*). For further details see al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharāʾij wa-l-jarāʾiḥ*,

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day the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Mutawakkil[86] received a visit from an Indian wizard who performed his witchcraft by means of a box. Al-Mutawakkil asked the wizard to perform an act of witchcraft that would bring shame on the Imām ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Naqī[87] and promised him the sum of 1000 *dīnār*s if he succeeded. The wizard agreed, and the caliph prepared a feast to which the Imām, the wizard and others were invited. When the Imām arrived he leaned on a prop to his left that had a lion drawn on it. When the meal began the Imām reached for the bread, but the wizard made it fly around the room. Everyone present burst out in laughter and mocked the Imām. The latter then struck the painting of the lion on the prop and ordered it: "Go and devour the wizard!" Suddenly the painted lion became real, pounced on the Indian wizard and swallowed him; then it returned and became a picture once more. Everyone present was upset. The caliph asked the Imām to restore the wizard to life, to which the Imām replied: "I swear to you that the wizard will never return to life." He then added: "How dare you use the enemies of God to attack the friends of God." The Imām then left the caliph's palace and the wizard was never seen again.

These three traditions exemplify the Imām's ability to affect objects around him. Since the miracle involved in all these traditions included a fundamental change in the characteristics of the objects in question, in this case paintings or drawings, the miracles consist not just in the timing of the occurrence but also in the very nature of the occurrence itself. The Imām embodied inanimate objects with traits that only living – in fact only sentient – beings possess.

The means by which the miracles are performed are also worth noting:[88] a loud shout or a blow to the picture cause the miracle and the living lion to materialize. The descriptions of the lion's deeds are very graphic,

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I, 393; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, L, 192 no. 6; al-Nabāṭī, *al-Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, II, 204 no. 8; ʿAlī ibn ʿĪsā al-Irbillī, *Kashf al-ghumma*, ed. Hāshim al-Rasūlī (Tabriz, 1961), II, 393.

86) The tenth ʿAbbāsid caliph, r. 232–47/847–67. See Hugh Kennedy, art. "al-Mutawwakil ʿalā llāh" in *EI*², VII (1993), 777–78.

87) al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharā'ij wa-l-jarā'iḥ*, I, 400–401; also Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥārith (al-Shaykh al-Bahā'ī), *Miftāḥ al-fallāḥ* (Beirut, 1984), 213; Hāshim al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-maʿājiz* (Qumm, 1992), II, 138; al-Irbillī, *Kashf al-ghumma*, II, 393–94.

88) Other actions by which Imāms are reported to perform miracles are stamping with the foot on the ground, anointing and blindfolding another, and calling out God's name.

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indeed, gruesome. However, since the victims are depicted as refusing to believe in the Imām or as scorning him, they do not arouse any sympathy in the narrator or in the listener. What happens to the victims is perceived as divine punishment.

Repelling, Cursing and Killing the Imām's Enemies

In the following tradition the Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq is reported to have heard that the poet al-Ḥakam ibn ʿAyyāsh al-Kalbī[89] mocked and denounced Zayd ibn ʿAlī (d. 122/740) in verse. Among other things, he wrote that the caliph ʿAlī cannot be compared to his predecessor ʿUthmān (r. 23–35/644–56) and that the latter was the better of the two. When the Imām heard of this he raised his trembling hands towards heaven and cursed the poet: "Oh God! If al-Ḥakam is lying, send one of your dogs to devour him." Some days later al-Ḥakam was sent by the Umayyads to al-Kūfa. On the way he and his companions slept out in the open. They lay in a circle with him in the middle. While they slept a lion approached the group, sniffed at each man and finally recognized al-Ḥakam by his smell and devoured him.[90] In this tale the lion appears in answer to the Imām's curse. The lion is credited with being able to "smell out" the Imām's enemies.

This tradition is quite clearly modelled on the story of the Prophet Muḥammad and ʿUtayba ibn Abī Lahab, the Prophet's son-in-law, married to his daughter Umm Kulthūm.[91] ʿUtayba's father Abū Lahab[92] found out that a verse of the Qur'ān says of him: "The power of Abū Lahab will perish, and he will perish."[93] As a result his son spit in the

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89) For more on his poetry, its anti-Shīʿite overtones and his attacks on Zayd ibn ʿAlī, see Mufliḥ al-Nimr al-Fāʿiz, *Shʿr al-qabāʾil al-yamānīya fī l-ʿaṣr al-umawī* (Amman, 2001), 144–45. See also Abū l-ʿAbbās Muḥammad ibn Zayd al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil fī l-lugha wa-l-adab*, ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad al-Dālī (Beirut, 1986), III, 1317.

90) ʿAlī ibn Ḥusayn al-Hāshimī, *al-Mathālib al-muhimma fī taʾrīkh al-nabī wa-l-zahrāʾ wa-l-aʾimma* (Najaf, 1968), 157–58. In another version of this tradition the Imām whom the poet cursed was al-Bāqir rather than al-Ṣādiq; see al-Ṭabarī, *Dalāʾil al-imāma*, 95–96.

91) For further details on her see Frants Buhl/Ruth Roded, art. "Umm Kulthūm", in *EI*², X (2000), 855.

92) The Prophet's paternal uncle, a fierce opponent of Islam. See W. Montgomery Watt, art. "Abū Lahab" in *EI*², I (1960), 136–37.

93) Q. 111:1–2.

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Prophet's face in anger and divorced the Prophet's daughter, whereupon Muḥammad cursed ʿUtayba and asked God to send a "dog" [to devour him]. Sometime later ʿUtayba accompanied his father and others of the tribe of Quraysh[94] on a journey to Syria, and on the way they camped near a monastery, though one of the monks had warned them that there were lions in the vicinity. Fearing the Prophet's curse, Abū Lahab asked his fellow tribesmen to surround his son when they slept. While they were all asleep a lion came, sniffed out ʿUtayba, pounced on him and gave a blow to his arm. ʿUtayba awakened and cried out in fright to his companions: "Did I not tell you that the Prophet Muḥammad is a true prophet who speaks the truth, and that God fulfills his wishes?", and then the lion devoured him.

In this story, too, the lion is able to "sniff out" his intended victim; he does no harm to anyone else, but when he identifies ʿUtayba he pounces upon him and devours him.[95] Before doing so the lion speaks as follows in human language: "This is ʿUtayba son of Abū Lahab, who left Mecca in secret and claims that he will kill Muḥammad." He then tears ʿUtayba to pieces[96] in a story that figures in the genre of the *sīrat al-nabī*, or "biography of the Prophet". This was taken over by Shīʿite writers and ascribed to the Imām in order to express the idea that the latter's powers are comparable to those of a prophet.

In another tradition, transmitted in the name of ʿUmāra ibn Zayd,[97] a lion protects the Imām from his enemies. In this story a associate of the

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94) A prominent Arabian tribe of merchants that controlled Mecca in pre-Islamic times. See W. Montgomery Watt, art. "Ḳuraysh" in *EI*², V (1986), 434–35.

95) Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalāʾil al-nubūwa*, ed. Muḥammad Rawās Qalʿajī and ʿAbd al-Barr ʿAbbās (Beirut, 1991), 454–58.

96) al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharāʾij wa-l-jarāʾiḥ*, II, 521. According to another tradition the incident that began the series of events recounted in the text was the revelation of Q. 53:1, "By the Star when it goes down." ʿUtayba announced that he refused to believe in the Star, whereupon the Prophet cursed him and the same chain of events ensued. The poet Ḥassān ibn Thābit (d. 54/674), known as the "poet of the Prophet", wrote a ten-verse poem in which he described the incident in detail. See al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, LV, 9; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib*, I, 80–81.

97) His full name was Abū Zayd ʿUmāra ibn Zayd al-Khayrānī al-Hamdhānī al-Madanī. For further details see al-Ḥillī, *Rijāl*, 245 no. 17; al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 302 no. 827; Taqī l-Dīn al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī ibn Dāwūd, *Rijāl Ibn Dāwūd* (Tehran, 1963), 487 nos. 347, 445. However, according to Ibn al-Ghaḍāʾirī all the traditions reported by ʿUmāra are false. See Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ghaḍāʾirī, *Rijāl Ibn al-Ghaḍāʾirī* (Qumm, 1944), IV, 252.

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ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Maʾmūn asked him to kill the Imām ʿAlī al-Riḍā, who was present. Suddenly a lion appeared at the Imām's right shoulder and a snake on his left, and protected the Imām. The caliph then said to his son ʿAbbās: "I shall continue to love the Imām al-Riḍā, for I have witnessed many miracles he has performed; I have seen him taking dates out of a well and feeding a multitude."[98]

A Jewish Midrashic tale that may have influenced Shīʿite writers to a certain extent is the following. When Moses came with Aaron to Pharaoh's palace they saw that at every entrance there stood a pair of lions that no one could approach. But Moses and Aaron approached them and then Moses placed his staff on them. The lions rejoiced with them and licked their feet.[99]

In Shīʿite literature the idea of a lion that protects the Imām recurs quite frequently. The Shīʿite sect known as al-Ḥanafīya[100] or as al-Kaysānīya, headed by al-Mukhtār ibn Abī Saʿīd al-Thaqafī,[101] believed that the "Hidden Imām" Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīya,[102] who will in the fullness

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98) al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-maʿājiz*, VII, 21–22.

99) Ginsberg, *Legends of the Jews*, II, 332.

100) The sect, bent on avenging the death of Ḥusayn at Karbalāʾ, was named al-Kaysānīya or al-Mukhtārīya after the name of its leader, Mukhtār (agnomen Abū ʿUmar Kaysān). However, according to some sources the two names Mukhtār and Kaysān belong to two different individuals, Kaysān being a client (*mawlā*) of ʿAlī. See Wilferd Madelung, art. "al-Kaysāniyya" in *EI*², VI (1997), 836–38; also Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm ibn Aḥmad al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa-l-niḥal*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Muḥammad al-Wakīl (Cairo, n.d.), I, 147: W. Montgomery Watt, "Shīʿism under the Umayyads," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1960, 158–68.

101) For details see G. R. Hawting, art. "al-Mukhtār" in *EI*², VII (1993), 521–24.

102) Abū l-Qāsim Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib was the half-brother on his father's side of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. His mother was a prisoner taken in the battle of al-Yamāma, named Khawala bint Jaʿfar al-Ḥanafīya. He was born in the year of the caliph Abū Bakr's death (13/634) and is cited for traditions quoting the caliphs ʿUmar and ʿUthmān as well as some of the Prophet's Companions. After Ḥusayn's death at Karbalāʾ there were those who saw him as the leader of the Shīʿites. In the year 65/685 al-Mukhtār organized a rebellion in al-Kūfa in Ibn al-Ḥanafīya's name, but the latter took no part in it. He died in Medina in 81/700, but some of his followers believed that in the fullness of time he would reappear as the Mahdī. For further details see Frants Buhl, art. "Muhammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyya" in *EI*², VII (1993), 402–403. Wilferd Madelung, art. "Kaysāniyya" in *EI*², VI (1993), 836–38; Heinz Halm, *Shīʿism* (Edinburgh, 1991), 17–19. See also Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ* (Beirut, 1985), IV, 110–30; ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayna l-firaq*, ed. Ṭāhā ʿAbd al-Raʾūf Saʿd (Cairo, n.d.), 26–27.

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of time appear as the Mahdī, was in a cave on Mt. Raḍwā[103] in Arabia. The entrance to this cave was protected by two beasts, a lion on the right and a leopard on the left.[104]

Friedländer was of the opinion that Shīʿism was influenced in this matter by the prophecy in Isaiah 11:6–9, and saw in the peaceful coexistence of man and beast signs of the impending coming of the Mahdī. The fact that in the Shīʿite version of the story the lion and leopard have the task of guarding the Imām, an element missing from the biblical prophecy, is explained by Friedländer as resulting from the fact that in Isaiah the words "lion" and "leopard" appear in the singular form.[105]

A similar story about protective lions is also told in a Sunnī tradition about the second caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. In this tradition it is related that a messenger from the Byzantine emperor came to visit the caliph. When the messenger saw that the caliph was asleep he thought of killing him, but then suddenly two lions arose out of the soil and stood over the caliph. When he awoke the lions disappeared. ʿUmar asked the messenger what had happened, so the latter told him the story and then later converted to Islam.[106]

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[103]) A mountain in Medina; see Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, III, 51 *s. v.* "Raḍwā".

[104]) Opinions among Shīʿite writers differ as to the precise type and number of beasts guarding the future Mahdī. In addition to the version of one lion and one leopard there are at least four others: two lions and two leopards, two leopards and one lion, two lions, and an unspecified number of lions and leopards. See Wadād al-Qāḍī, *al-Kaysānīya fī l-taʾrīkh wa-l-adab* (Beirut, 1974), 180–81.

[105]) Israel Friedländer, "The Heterodoxies of the Shīʿites in the Presentation of Ibn Ḥazm", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 29 (1909), 37–38. In his words: "In any event the messianic character of this conception was misunderstood, the wild animals were taken to be accordingly substituted by the singular and in explanation the dual was added, which gives an entirely different appearance to the whole description."

[106]) Yūsuf ibn Ismāʿīl al-Nabhānī, *Jāmiʿ karāmāt al-awliyā'*, ed. Ibrāhīm ʿAṭwa ʿAwaḍ (Beirut, 1992), I, 159.

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From Assassin to Companion

In a story told by Ibrāhīm ibn Saʿd (d. 194/800)[107] it is related that the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170–93/786–809)[108] imprisoned the Imām ʿAlī al-Riḍā. One day the prison guards, on orders from the caliph, brought some lions to the Imām's place of imprisonment in the hope that they would devour him. But when they entered they wagged their tails, congratulated the Imām and told him that God would protect him from the caliph's evil intentions. When the caliph learned of this he freed the Imām and said: "I do this lest the Imām cast a spell on me and upon my retinue."[109] Here again the lion recognizes the Imām, greets him in a friendly manner and wishes him well.

In yet another story the Imām ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Naqī states that God has forbidden lions to devour the flesh of Fāṭima's descendents (i.e. of the Shīʿite Imāms and their blood relatives). The story is as follows. During the reign of the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Mutawakkil a woman appeared before him and claimed to be Zaynab, daughter of the Prophet's daughter Fāṭima.[110] The caliph said to her: "How can this be possible? After all, a long time has passed since the death of the Prophet Muḥammad." The woman replied: "God's Messenger anointed my forehead and asked God to restore my youth every 40 years; in all the time that has passed since then I have been in hiding, until I became so poor that I had to come out." The incredulous caliph summoned all the descendents of Abū Ṭālib, who told him that Zaynab, Fāṭima's daughter, had died many years previously. But the woman insisted that they were lying, so the caliph summoned the Imām al-Naqī to ask for his advice. The Imām duly came and told the caliph that lions are forbidden to eat the flesh of Fāṭima's descendents. He proposed that the woman be put in the lions' den; if she were who she claimed, then she would not be harmed. But the woman would not go into

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[107]) His full name is Ibrāhīm ibn Saʿd Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Zuhrī al-Madanī; see al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 157 nos. 1723–28.

[108]) The fifth ʿAbbāsid caliph, r. 170–93/786–809. For further details see F. Omar, art. "Hārūn al-Rashīd" in *EI*², III (1969), 232–34.

[109]) al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il al-imāma*, 321–22; see also al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-maʿājiz*, VI, 201. In a similar tradition it is related that the Imām Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī was thrown to the lions by a servant of the ʿAbbāsids by the name of Naḥrīr. When the servant later came to see what had become of the Imām he saw him praying, surrounded by the lions. See al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-maʿājiz*, VII, 646–47, 562.

[110]) According to another version Zaynab claimed that she was the daughter of Ḥasan the son of ʿAlī; see Donaldson, *The Shīʿite Religion*, 213.

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the den out of fear of being devoured. Thus all the assembled company learned that she was an impostor.[111]

It would appear that in this case Shīʿite tradition has performed an intercultural transformation, assimilating elements of Jewish legend, and in particular motifs from the Book of Daniel,[112] where it is related that Cyrus, king of Persia, threw Daniel into the lions' den, where he remained safe for seven days among the hungry beasts. The king then admitted that Daniel's God was the true God and ordered Daniel's enemies to be thrown into the lions' den. As soon as this was done the lions pounced on them and tore them to pieces.[113] Clearly the composers of the Shīʿite tradition intended to compare the Imām's powers with those of Daniel.

The Arab writer al-Ibshīhī provides another version of this tradition. In it Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia (d. 562 BCE) dreamed that he would be killed by a male child born in his kingdom. When he awoke he ordered that all newborn male children be killed. Daniel's mother, who was afraid for the life of her child, hid him in a well, where he was guarded by a lion.[114]

In another version of the story, also told by al-Ibshīhī, Nebuchadnezzar knew he was fated to be killed by Daniel and he therefore threw him into the lions' den. The two lions in the den wagged their tails and licked Daniel; he remained unharmed until Jeremiah came to him with food and water and released him.

Similar stories can be found in Sunnī collections of traditions. Thus, for example, it is related that the Prophet's Companion Mahrān (agnomen Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān), better known by his epithet Safīna (literally, "ship"),[115] was on a sea voyage when his boat sprang a leak and he

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111) al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharāʾij wa-l-jarāʾiḥ*, I, 404.

112) The story of Daniel in the lions' den has played a prominent role in the lore of the revealed religions. Thus, for example, R. Israel Najjāra in an Aramaic poem alludes to the Book of Daniel in order to express God's protection of the people of Israel. For further details see Yigal ARIEL, *Myrrh and Myrtle: Studies in the Books of Daniel and Esther, Redemption in the Books of the Exile* (Hispin, Israel, 2000), 128 n. 44 [Hebrew]. See also al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, LXII, 81.

113) For details see GINSBERG, *Legends of the Jews*, IV, 346.

114) Shihāb al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ibshīhī, *al-Mustaṭraf fī kull fann mustaẓraf* (Beirut, 1992), 533.

115) The Prophet gave him this nickname because of the heavy loads he carried, in the manner of a ship. According to another version the name alludes to the "ship of the desert", or camel, in an allusion to his frequent journeys. For further details see, for example, Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, *al-Maqāmāt al-ʿalīya fī l-karāmāt al-jalīya li-baʿḍ al-ṣaḥāba*, ed. ʿIffat Wiṣāl ḤAMZA (sine loco, 1986), 86; al-Nabḥānī, *Jāmiʿ karāmāt al-awliyāʾ*, I, 143. See also Ibn Taymīya, *Muʿjizāt*, 22 n. 3.

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was forced to anchor near a forest. Suddenly a lion appeared. Safīna said to the lion: "Oh Abū l-Ḥārith (an expression meaning "lion" in Arabic)! I am Safīna, the friend of Muḥammad, the Messenger of God." Upon hearing this the lion lowered its head and began pushing Safīna to safety. Then the lion took leave of him with a roar.

Another tradition relates that ʿUqba ibn Nāfiʿ (d. 63/683),[116] a Companion of the Prophet sent by the caliph Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān (r. 41–60/661–80)[117] to conquer North Africa with an army of 10,000 men, came to a place infested with lions, snakes and other dangerous animals. ʿUqba approached this place, which no man dared enter, cursed the animals in the name of God, and made them all flee, including the lions, who carried away their cubs in their mouths.[118] The message conveyed by this story is that the Prophet's Companions have the power, when they appeal to God, to subdue lions to their will.

A similar tale appears in the genre of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, or "tales of the prophets". When Moses came to Egypt, Aaron, whom God had informed of Moses' coming, went to meet him on the bank of the Nile. That day was also the appointed day for Pharaoh's lions to drink from the Nile. When Moses passed by the lions they raised their heads and stared at him, but then God filled them with fear and they fled to their lairs near Pharaoh's palace.[119] Contrary to what we have seen in previous traditions, in this tale the lions, after realizing that they are in the presence of a prophet, are fearful and flee.

According to yet another tradition, it is told that a lion encountered the ascetic Ibrāhīm ibn al-Adham (d. 161/778),[120] who was on a journey together with some companions. Ibrāhīm asked his companions to address the lion together, as follows: Oh God! Guard us with your eyes that never sleep, protect us with your principles that cannot be fathomed, and have mercy on us with your might so that we do not die. You are our hope,

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116) One of the most important Muslim generals in the early years of Islam and founder of the city of al-Qayrawān in North Africa. For further details see Vassilios Christides, art. "ʿUḳba b. Nāfiʿ" in *EI*², X (2000), 789.

117) The first Umayyad caliph and founder of the dynasty. See Martin Hinds, art. "Muʿāwiya" in *EI*², VII (1993), 263–68.

118) For more on this story see, for example, Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, *al-Maqāmāt al-ʿalīya*, 89–90.

119) Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Naysabūrī al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (also known as *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*) (Beirut, n.d.), 161.

120) For further details see Russell Jones, art. "Ibrāhīm b. Adham" in *EI*², III (1969), 985–86.

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oh God, oh God." When they had finished uttering this call the lion fled without having done them any harm.

To conclude, we have seen that lions are represented as being able to recognize Imāms, prophets, Companions of the Prophet and ascetics. They never attack them, they sometimes greet them with a wag of the tail, and occasionally they protect them. The Shīʿite traditions we have discussed emphasize the loyalty of lions to Shīʿite Imāms, in contrast to many humans who belong to other Islamic sects and do not recognize the Imāms. The lions do not attack the Imām even when they are hungry.

From a psychological point of view this development can be explained in terms of coping with the harsh realities of the lot of Shīʿites and their Imāms. The waning hopes for a more just treatment of their Imāms by the rulers of Islam arouse in Shīʿites a belief in occult powers possessed by the Imāms that enable them to extricate themselves from the impossible situation in which they find themselves. In other words, the lion who befriends the Imām compensates for what is happening in reality, or provides an interpretation of that reality. This would appear to be the historical background that encouraged the development of this genre of story, with its lions and miracles that help the Imām cope with the dangers he faces, both internal and external.

Conclusion

In the traditions discussed above, the miracles involving an Imām and a lion are usually aimed at an individual, especially a non-believer in the Imāmate in general or in a particular Imām's right to the office. Such an individual, whether an anti-Shīʿite caliph or another person, stands in danger of being devoured by the lion as divine punishment, with the Imām's agreement or encouragement.

The common denominator among the lion's victims is thus their refusal to recognize and swear fealty to the Imām. The victim's fate arouses no sympathy in the reader, since the former is presented as hostile to the Imām, whose status is confirmed by means of the miracle. Miracles compensate the Imāms for their political impotence; their spiritual rule took the place of the material power they lacked. Convincing their followers of the need for absolute loyalty was the only way they had to impose their authority.

The lion in these miracles appears during the day or at night, in a forest, on a road or even within a picture or in a cage at the caliph's palace. The image of the lion consists of a combination of its actual natural characteristics together with various subjective humanizing features and

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even some supernatural attributes. For example, the lion speaks with the Imām, exhibits human-like behavior and even shares with the Imām the possession of occult knowledge.

The lion at the Imām's disposal is capable of applying magical powers and devours those who are not loyal to the Imām or who scorn him. It demonstrates its friendship towards the Imām, identifies him, helps and obeys him, refuses passage to travellers until they curse the Imām's murderers, or guards valuable possessions belonging to the Imām and makes sure that they arrive safely. The lion also serves as the Imām's mount, enabling him to traverse vast distances in a short time.

The Imām can call on the lion at any time; he can even summon a real lion out of a picture. It is always the Imām who initiates the summons of the lion and he obviously has command over it.

Both Imām and lion are portrayed as possessing supernatural powers, but the lion's powers are subordinated to the Imām's will. The Imām uses the lion to attain his aims; the lion obeys the Imām, who can understand what the lion says. The encounter between the Imām and the lion is the central foundation of the miracles performed by the Imām; it drives the events surrounding them and its various manifestations create different interactions and versions.

All the traditions about Imāms' miracles with lions at their center are represented as occurring at a certain actual time; the narrators of the traditions present the stories as events that actually happened, the characteristics of the Imām as existing in real fact, and so also the wonders he performed. In all the traditions the true hero is the Imām: he stands at the focus of the story, which begins and ends with him. He dictates the course of events, and whenever anyone encounters a lion it is only the Imām who is able to extricate him from danger.

As we have shown in the present study, lions appear in classical Arabic literature and in the literatures of other peoples; Shīʿite writers were in all likelihood influenced by these literatures. The transformation of the lion motif from classical sources and the import of lions' tales from other cultures created the foundations for the emergence and development of the Shīʿite miracle stories involving lions as important participants. The fact that these traditions have survived for many centuries proves that they answer social and cultural needs. The narrators of these traditions have a definite social, religious or political agenda, and they fit their stories to their target audience.

In conclusion, by providing the lion with human characteristics and making it play such an important role in miracles performed by the Imām, Shīʿite writers are telling their audiences that God granted the

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Imāms supernatural powers and gave them control over lions just as He had given such control to the prophets in days past. The prophets, and after them the Shīʿite Imāms, possess wisdom and knowledge, while the lions possess strength and courage. The Imām unites his own wisdom with the lion's strength and so, with God's permission, controls this beast, the strongest and most impressive of all animals.

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